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The National Awami Party of Pakistan: Leftist Politics in Crisis

M. Rashiduzzaman

THE NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY was the first political organisation in Pakistan with an avowedly leftist programme.¹ Until the promulgation of martial law in October 1958, it held the balance of power in the East and West Pakistan legislatures; in the National Assembly it provided a small but articulate opposition which constantly harped upon anti-Western policy and dismemberment of "One Unit" in West Pakistan. This strategy had been, both at the centre and in the provinces, to avoid holding office. Off the floors of the Houses, the NAP was determined to make the "down-trodden" of society more conscious of their problems. Its declared objective had been to launch an uncompromising struggle against imperialism and feudalism.² Martial Law in 1958 was a set-back for the NAP as it was for other parties. Yet some of the workers continued the party's activities underground.³ After the introduction of the 1962 Constitution and revival of political activities in the country the NAP leaders joined the other opposition political parties to form the National Democratic Front (NDF) in the hope of launching a united movement against the Ayub regime.⁴

The NAP was eventually revived in 1964 and since then has passed through several crucial stages. First, it supported the combined opposition parties' presidential candidate, Miss Fatima Jinnah, in 1965 and later contested the legislative elections through the electoral college consisting of the "Basic Democrats." Second, it organised workers and peasants and tried to give a new turn to their movement. Third, owing to internal factions, personal rivalries and ideological considerations, the NAP divided into pro-Moscow (Muzaffar Ahmed) and pro-Chinese (Bhasani) groups in December 1967. Fourth, the question of participation in the elections scheduled to be held in October 1970 has further widened the gap be-

¹ Mushtaq Ahmed, *Government and Politics in Pakistan*, Karachi, 1963, p. 161. At the time of independence in 1947, however, there was one organisation called Democratic Youth League in East Pakistan which also evidently had a leftist programme. Subsequently, the workers of this organisation identified themselves with the Awami Muslim League which was born in June 1949. The Azad Pakistan Party in West Pakistan led by Mian Iftikharuddin was also known as a leftist party and in 1957 it merged with the NAP.

² *Report of the General Secreatry, East Pakistan NAP Council Session*, Dacca, 1965.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *National Democratic Front* (pamphlet), Dacca, 1962.

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tween these two factions of the NAP: the followers of Bhasani are also now divided into at least three sub-factions, one of which is directly opposed to elections and favours an immediate armed proletarian revolution.

The National Awami Party was brought into being in July 1957 by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and his leftist followers who decided to break away from the parent Awami League in order to have a platform of their own. Over 500 leftists of various ranks from all over the country assembled at Dacca to form the new political party.⁵ The two main components of the new party were the “Bhasani-faction” of the East Pakistan Awami League and the left-wing *Ganatantri Dal* (Democratic Party) which was formed in 1953 and later joined the electoral alliance with the Awami League and *Krishak Sramik* (Peasants and Workers) Party to form the United Front which defeated the Muslim League in 1954. The main objectives of the new party were: an independent foreign policy, abrogation of military pacts, regional autonomy, dissolution of One Unit in West Pakistan, reorganisation of the West Wing into a number of provinces on a linguistic, cultural and geographical basis, and the abolition of the *Zamindari* system in West Pakistan.⁶ The creation of a separate political party was accompanied by the parallel formation of NAP Parliamentary Parties in the Central and Provincial legislatures.⁷

The NAP did not originate with a Marxist ideology. Maulana Bhasani, the NAP leader, was never a Marxist although his ideas would bring him near to that particular camp. A life-long agitator, the Maulana established the party more to organise protest against the pro-Western policy of the government than to establish Marxist socialism. Party workers were successful in establishing their organisational network in all the districts of East Pakistan except the Chittagong Hill Tracts.⁸ Their main strategy was to malign the Awami League as being an organisation of the urban petty bourgeoisie committed to their vested interests.⁹ In practice, though the NAP itself was also a party predominantly led by urbanised politicians representing a professional and landlord background,¹⁰ it was far from becoming a party of the proletariat. Its student wing—essential to any credible parliamentary party in East Pakistan—was the East Pakistan Students Union (EPSU).

The fact that the National Awami Party was not basically equipped for a class struggle is established by its development as a party since its revival

⁵ *Morning News* (Karachi), July 26, 1957.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, September 7, 1957.

⁸ *Report of the General Secretary, op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁹ Kamruddin Ahmed, *Social History of East Pakistan*, Dacca, 1967.

¹⁰ West Pakistan NAP leaders like Mian Iftikharuddin, G. M. Syed and Mahmudul Huq Usmani came from rich landholder backgrounds whereas their East Pakistani counterparts came from teaching, business, law and trade unionism.

in March 1964. From 1962 it had extended full support to the united struggle for the restoration of democratic rights led by such men as H. S. Suhrawardy, Nurul Amin, Khawaja Nazimuddin, all undoubtedly "rightists."¹¹ The National Democratic Front (NDF) pledged itself to launch a countrywide movement for the establishment of "unalloyed democracy" in Pakistan and demanded the restoration of the 1956 Constitution for the establishment of rule of law in the country.¹² At this stage, then, the distinction between the right and left could hardly be felt among all the opposition parties who were now united against President Ayub Khan's 1962 Constitution.

This unity soon proved to be illusory. No united action could be effectively launched by the NDF and later both the Awami League and the Jamat-i-Islam were revived. This was a blow and the leftist elements felt the need to reestablish their separate identity and hence the Central Committee decided in March 1964 to revive the NAP. After a long period of inaction, it was no easy job to revive a political party on a sound footing. The old leadership of the NAP was no longer effective. The organisational loyalty of its members had weakened. Mahmud Ali, the General Secretary of the East Pakistan NAP defied his Central Committee's directives as he was more inclined towards the united opposition with the rightists through the NDF. Soon he was expelled from the party, as were a number of workers in various districts on the grounds of alleged "activities against the party."¹³ The NAP's first attempt was to rid itself of its own "right wing."

Although the party was revived, it was not sufficiently strong to take any major step entirely on its own. The NAP extended co-operation to the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) to nominate Miss Fatima Jinnah as their candidate for the presidential elections of 1965. The nine-point COP programme was accepted by the NAP even though it was in principle opposed to the proposal of establishing an Islamic social order in Pakistan, a concept utterly contradictory to its declared objective of establishing a secular state.¹⁴ Later, the leaders confessed that it was a great blunder for the party to compromise on such a fundamental issue.¹⁵ The main objective of the NAP in supporting the electoral alliance was to utilise the election campaign for strengthening its organisation.¹⁶ After the defeat of Miss Jinnah, the COP became ineffective and it collapsed under the strain of internal feuds. The NAP, however, issued its own election-manifesto for the National Assembly elections which embodied the following main points:

¹¹ See also *National Democratic Front: Declaration of Objectives*, Dacca, 1964; and *Statement of Nine Leaders* (a Bengali pamphlet), Dacca, 1962.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³ *Report of the General Secretary, op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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- (a) To put an end to dictatorship and establish democracy.
- (b) To release political prisoners and achieve individual freedom.
- (c) To improve the standard of living of the people.
- (d) To achieve economic and cultural progress of the country.
- (e) To achieve full regional autonomy for East Pakistan.
- (f) To free the country from the clutches of U.S. imperialism.¹⁷

The strength of various political parties in the National Assembly as a result of the 1965 elections was as follows:¹⁸

Pakistan Muslim League (Convention) (Government Party)	129
United Parliamentary Party	14
National Awami Party	3
Independent Group	5
Council Muslim League	1

It is interesting to note that the opposition was completely routed in this election. The failure of the opposition parties can be largely attributed to the restricted franchise and official influence. Largely disillusioned by the results of the election, the NAP resolved on an organised mass movement for the defeat of imperialism, achievement of democratic rights and provincial autonomy and their solution of the various other problems facing the country.¹⁹ But the party was not yet confident of being able to launch any big movement and largely concentrated on the observance of "Protest Days" on various occasions.

The Awami League gave a new turn to Pakistan politics in March 1966 when it emerged with a demand for maximum regional autonomy embodied in the Six-Point Programme.²⁰ The programme became popular in East Pakistan and by June 1966 sparked off a genuine movement in the province. The National Awami Party did not align itself with the six-point movement and instead came out with its own Fourteen-Point Programme which reiterated its stand for provincial autonomy, civil rights and democracy.²¹ "Anti-imperialism" was declared to be the basis of this programme, an emphasis not liked by a significant group of the NAP who wanted first to get rid of the autocratic government in the country.²² Anti-imperialism, according to this group, was not strictly relevant to the domestic struggle. However, for some time, a direct split in the parties was averted by the efforts of Maulana Bhasani.

¹⁷ *Election Manifesto of East Pakistan National Awami Party*, Dacca, 1965.

¹⁸ See also Rashiduzzaman, "The National Assembly of Pakistan under 1962 Constitution," *Pacific Affairs*, Winter, 1969-70.

¹⁹ *Report of the General Secretary*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁰ See also *Six-Point Programme: Our Right to Live*, Dacca, 1966.

²¹ *Holiday*, June 12, 1966. (*Holiday* is an English weekly published from Dacca which supports the pro-Bhasani NAP).

²² *Ibid.*

The year 1967 was eventful for the NAP for more than one reason. First, it marked the transition for the party from the politics of protest to the politics of articulation and mobilisation. Secondly, it proved to be the year when the party was completely divided into two separate camps. As already noted, the NAP was more committed to an anti-Western foreign policy than to real socialism; its policy was not oriented towards the organisation of labour and peasants. On the industrial labour front, the *Sramik* (labour) Federation was active in organising the workers in industrial areas. More interesting and novel was the organisation of the peasants. Maulana Bhasani was personally interested in bringing his party closer to the farmers. Under his leadership, a peasant front called the East Pakistan Peasants' Society was formed and its branches spread to the remotest corners of the province.

Some of the significant peasant gatherings of the NAP were held this year. One of them was the East Pakistan Jute Growers Conference held on 27 January 1967.²³ It tabled a number of vital demands on behalf of the peasants, including a fair price for jute, the abolition of land-holding and money-lending, the reduction of taxes, the establishment of proper irrigation systems, nationalisation of the jute trade and release of political prisoners.²⁴ The provincial conference of the East Pakistan Peasants' Society was held at Kulaora in April 1967, Mr. Abdul Haque, a disciple of Maulana Bhasani, being the moving spirit behind it. The resolutions passed in this conference also emphasised the need for peasants' welfare and were more or less identical with the earlier demands.²⁵ Another important gathering was the Special Council Session of the East Pakistan Peasants' Society held at Rangpur in November 1967 where Maulana Bhasani categorically declared that the main objective of his organisation was the establishment of a socialist society.²⁶

While the NAP was taking this important step in extending its influence in the rural areas by organising the peasants, the party suffered a serious setback when in December 1967 it split into two separate rival bodies. The anti-Bhasani faction of the East Pakistan NAP, also known as the "pro-Moscow" wing, gained ground during Maulana Bhasani's long illness and hospitalization. In his bid to save his party from the division, he called a special council session of the NAP at Rangpur in November 1967, but the "rebel" faction refused to attend and decided instead to hold its own

²³ For details see *East Pakistan Jute Growers Conference, Presidential speech of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani* (Bengali pamphlet), Dacca, 1967.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See also *Resolutions adopted in the Conference of the East Pakistan Peasants' Society held at Kulaora in April, 1967*, Dacca, 1967.

²⁶ See also *Speech of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani* (Bengali pamphlet), Rangpur, 1967.

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Council meeting in Dacca on December 16 and 17.²⁷ The announcement of the rival council session was made by four NAP leaders, Professor Muzaffar Ahmed, Mr. Mohiuddin, Pir Habibur Rahman and Dewan Mahbub Ali.²⁸

The split of the NAP can be interpreted in various ways. In the eyes of the militant pro-Bhasani faction, the dissident wing was composed of the bourgeois elements, and this was demonstrated by their eagerness to establish an alliance with other parties dominated by landlords and the business class.²⁹ This characteristic made the NAP dissidents all the more eager for an alliance with the right-wing opposition parties. The pro-Bhasani faction of the party claimed to be the representatives of the peasants and Labour. Now that they had alienated their bourgeoisie co-workers, they knew they had to work harder amongst the proletariat to strengthen themselves as a political force.³⁰

The split in the East Pakistan NAP gradually affected the West Pakistan NAP as well. In West Pakistan, the pro-Moscow leftist force led by Mr. Wali Khan (the son of the Red Shirt leader Abdul Gaffar Khan) was fairly strong in the North West Frontier Province. Soon Mr. Usmani, another leftist leader from West Pakistan, and Mr. Wali Khan joined the "rebel" NAP of East Pakistan led by Professor Muzaffar Ahmed and held their first Council meeting in Peshawar on 30 June and 1 July 1968. It was in this gathering that the pro-Moscow NAP spelled out its programme and pinpointed its differences with the other group.³¹ It was in the same party meeting that it first claimed the status of a separate party and called itself the Pakistan National Awami Party. Several causes of the division were indicated and they may be summed up as follows:

(1) The split in the NAP was not fortuitous. Political differences on such vital issues as the attitude towards the ruling clique, the formation of a united front of all the democratic and opposition forces and the immediate objective of the party had troubled the party for some time. These differences were manifested in the following forms:

(a) NAP had always held that the government of the country was an autocratic combination of the big bourgeoisie and landlords and that it was in the interest of the people that this government should be replaced by a democratic one. A group inside the party had however suddenly discovered that the government was respectably anti-imperialist and therefore their opposition to it was qualified.

(b) NAP had firmly followed the policy of forging a broad united front of all

²⁷ *Holiday*, November 26, 1967.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See also *Resolutions adopted at the Pakistan National Awami Party Council Meeting held on 30th June and 1st July at Peshawar*, Karachi, 1967.

the democratic and opposition forces on the basis of a minimum democratic programme, acceptable to all the parties concerned. But the leaders of the radical "pro-Bhasani" group in the party had sabotaged the growth of the popular movement. (c) NAP had declared socialism as its ultimate goal, to be achieved through democratic means. Such a transition from capitalism to socialism was essential in view of the peculiar socio-economic conditions of the country. But the militant group in the party had deviated from this declared policy, and had thus lowered the prestige of the NAP in the eyes of the people.

(2) A large section of the Party in both parts of the country had firmly stood their ground against this group and its erroneous policies and tried to uphold the accepted programme and policies of the party. Eventually, the "deviationist group" was forced to form a parallel organisation, also called National Awami Party.

(3) The most unfortunate and damaging effect of the split was felt by the "most progressive" section of the "democratic camp."³²

The "Bhasani-NAP" then circulated a booklet refuting all the points made by the "Muzaffar-Wali Khan NAP" and strongly asserted its own stand on various aspects of its policy.³³ Its author, Mohammad Sultan, was the acting Secretary of the East Pakistan NAP (Bhasani) and his points may be summed up as follows:

(a) It was incorrect to say that the followers of Maulana Bhasani were "soft" on the Ayub regime. In fact, NAP was the only political party in Pakistan which consistently fought against the Ayub regime for its pro-Imperialist policy.

(b) The NAP was opposed to the Awami League six-point programme as it only demanded regional autonomy for East Pakistan and did not oppose imperialism and feudalism.

(c) The NAP believed in the democratic government of the people which could only be established after putting an end to imperialism and feudalism. The "slogans" of parliamentary democracy can only replace one government by another but cannot establish a real "democracy of the people" free from "exploitation". The NAP wanted only that kind of democracy which would be in the real interests of the people.

(d) Those who broke away from the parent organisation and formed a counter NAP were "defectors" and they should not be considered a loss to the party. The departure of such elements would only strengthen the organisation with the support of more committed followers.³⁴

An examination of the circumstances of the split in the NAP reveals what the pro-Moscow faction stood for. It was clearly for the establishment of socialism through democratic means.³⁵ For all practical purposes it emerged as a parliamentary party ready to contest elections with a manifesto

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Mohammad Sultan, *Hold the Flag of NAP above factional Politics* (a Bengali booklet). Dacca, 1968.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Pakistan National Awami Party: Ideology, Objectives and Programme*, Dacca, 1968.

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of its own. It called for a neutral foreign policy and withdrawal from the pacts and treaties which Pakistan had entered with the U.S. and other pro-western countries. It also declared that feudalism in various forms should be abolished and that landlords' surplus land would be distributed among the peasants.³⁶ There was also a variety of proposals in the objectives of the party which, in substance, amount to a programme for a welfare state.³⁷

While the pro-Moscow NAP clearly came forward with a programme for democratic socialism, the Bhasani NAP had, so far, confined itself only to the polemics of socialism. Even now it is difficult to say exactly what it stands for. One thing is clear: the Bhasani-NAP wants to establish a socialist order. But how? Through democratic means? Maulana Bhasani and his followers speak for democracy but they interpret it differently from its meaning in the western countries. By democracy they seem to mean the "economic freedom" of a Communist society.³⁸

It was from this concept of democracy that the difference between the two factions of the party arose. There was also a clear militancy about the influence of the United States in Pakistan. It was argued that many of the evils in Pakistan arising from feudalism and monopoly capitalism could largely be attributed to the influence of the United States.³⁹ The Bhasani-NAP's supplementary organisation—the East Pakistan Peasants Society—was equally bitter about the influence of United States.⁴⁰ On the other hand, there was a strikingly different attitude towards Red China. In a series of publications the "glory" and the "achievements" of Red China have been publicised.

The differences between the two NAP's were not, however, discernible during the great mass-movements launched from December 1968 to March 1969 which eventually led to the downfall of the Ayub regime. All the opposition parties achieved an understanding in order to form the Democratic Action Committee (DAC) early in January 1969 to launch a mass agitation against President Ayub. The formation of the DAC was at once followed by similar alliances among the student parties.⁴¹ All the student parties aligned to the opposition now joined together to form the Students' Action Committee (SAC) and formulate its eleven-point programme,

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸ Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ *East Pakistan Peasants Society: Ideology, Objectives and Constitution*, Dacca, 1967.

⁴¹ In East Pakistan, every political party has its parallel students' organization. The left-wing East Pakistan Students' Union (EPSU) is aligned with the NAP. Following the rift in the NAP, the EPSU was also divided into Menon (pro-Chinese) and Motia (pro-Moscow) factions in 1968. The Awami League is supported by the East Pakistan Students League (EPSL) and the Muslim League (Convention) was supported by National Students Federation (NSF) (Jamir group)

which soon came to be the main political theme of the country and provided the basis of political unity among the various parties.⁴² The salient features of the eleven-point programme included:

(1) Parliamentary democracy was to be based on universal adult franchise, full autonomy for East Pakistan and for the former provinces of West Pakistan, leaving with the Federal Government only three subjects: defence, foreign policy and currency.

(2) East Pakistan should be given the power to form a militia or a para-military force and the naval headquarters should be transferred to this province.

(3) The federal government would have no power to levy taxes and each federating state would maintain separate accounts of foreign trade.

(4) Economic demands incorporated in the programme include: nationalisation of banking, insurance and big industries, a reduction in the burden of taxes and levies on the farmers and proper wages and bonuses to workers.

In addition there were demands for the repeal of all repressive laws, end of the Emergency declared at the time of the September 1965 conflict with India and still in force in early 1969, release of political detenus and the withdrawal of all political cases. There were also special educational demands in the shape of various kinds of facilities to the students.⁴³ Another demand was for a non-aligned foreign policy and an end to the involvement with the Pakistan-U.S. Military Pact, SEATO and CENTO.

All this was much more than a students' action programme. In fact, it was a minimum programme to unite the leftists as well as the rightist wings of opposition in East Pakistan. An analysis of the programme clearly indicates that the educational demands constituted only a fraction of it. The main issues were political and economic. It combined the basic issues of the Awami League six-point programme with the minimum demands of the NAP.⁴⁴ In the agitation launched by the students in Dacca in January, 1969, the first "martyr" was Asaduzzaman, a leftist student leader.⁴⁵ This incident sparked off a chain reaction all over the country and in the ensuing agitations and clashes with the police more than 100 people were killed in the eastern wing alone.⁴⁶ Gradually, the students gained support from the indus-

⁴² *Pakistan Observer*, January 6, 1969.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Also *Launch United Movement on the Basis of 11-Point Programme* (a pamphlet in Bengali distributed in January 1969).

⁴⁴ See also Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *Six-Point Programme, Our Right to Live*, Dacca, 1966; and Rashiduzzaman, "The Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan," *Asian Survey*, July 1970.

⁴⁵ *Pakistan Observer*, Jan. 20, 1969. The student was a leader of the left-wing EPSU.

⁴⁶ Unofficial estimate given by the newspapers. There were also several deaths in West Pakistan.

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trial workers who marched in thousands from the suburban industrial area at Tongi and Narayanganj.⁴⁷ The President of the pro-Chinese NAP, Maulana Bhasani, also participated in the movement actively for most of the time, though at certain intervals he showed a curious unwillingness to remain in the company of the masses and withdrew into seclusion.⁴⁸

Pressured by this massive political upheaval, President Ayub decided against contesting the next presidential election and called a Round Table Conference to discuss the political future of the country with the leaders of various parties. Now that the objective of removing Ayub was nearing its goal, the NAP changed its strategy. Maulana Bhasani denounced the Round Table Conference and endorsed the "politics of the street."⁴⁹ He declared that the Round Table Conference was "hopelessly inadequate to promote the interests of the working class and the peasantry,"⁵⁰ and on this score refused to join the Conference in spite of a great deal of persuasion by both the Government and his fellow politicians. Eventually, Maulana Bhasani and Z. A. Bhutto (who had resigned as Foreign Minister of Pakistan in 1966 and formed the Pakistan Peoples' Party with a socialist programme) were the only two prominent leaders who absented themselves from the Round Table Conference at Rawalpindi in March 1969.

While Maulana Bhasani was refusing to join the Round Table Conference, his followers were using the tactic of *Gherao*.⁵¹ The movement initially started by the pro-Chinese NAP in the form of the *Gherao* of corrupt officers and government agencies began to spread in the rural areas.⁵² By March 1969, the workers took it into their heads to realise their demands from the employers by coercion and intimidation, the process starting from the Tongi industrial area.⁵³ (The term *Gherao* had been imported from West Bengal where workers used similar methods of force and intimidation to redress their demands.) The government, already crippled under the pressure of mass movements, was unable to deal with this new form of confrontation between employers and employees. The situation deteriorated so rapidly that East Pakistan's business and industry were virtually paralysed. This downhill trend was finally checked by the declaration of Martial Law on March 25, 1969.

After President Ayub Khan handed over power to the army and General

⁴⁷ The workers of Tongi Industrial area are known to be under the influence of some of the leaders of the pro-Chinese NAP.

⁴⁸ Badruddin Omar, "The Political Cycle of Maulana Bhasani," *Holiday*, January 18, 1970.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Gherao* literally means encirclement, but is used as a special term to mean the confinement of Government officials or managers to their offices, sometimes without food or water, until they give in to workers' demands.

⁵² Kamruddin Ahmed, *Labour Movement in East Pakistan*, Dacca, 1969, p. 96.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Yahya declared Martial Law on March 25, 1969, the political parties had to function under various restrictions until January 1, 1970 when they were allowed to operate freely. As soon as he assumed power, General Yahya declared that he would transfer power to the representatives elected by the people. To redeem his pledge, he announced on November 28, 1969, that elections would be held in October 1970 to form a National Assembly which will be responsible for framing the Constitution. So far, all the political parties in Pakistan except the pro-Chinese Bhasani-NAP have welcomed General Yahya's decision to hold the elections.

The pro-Moscow NAP enthusiastically welcomed the decision to hold elections from their platforms in both the wings of Pakistan. Their views had been fully articulated in two brochures published in January 1970.⁵⁴ They have accepted the election as an important step in the "struggles" for the establishment of a democratic society free from exploitation by the feudalists and monopolists.⁵⁵ The chief of the NAP (pro-Moscow), Khan Abdul Wali Khan, called upon the people to rise and boldly participate in the forthcoming elections.⁵⁶ He has said: "It would be the biggest misfortune of the country if elections were postponed or delayed".⁵⁷ In another public meeting he gave a stern warning to those who were out to disrupt the elections.⁵⁸ The pro-Moscow East Pakistan NAP Executive Committee also came out with a similar warning against those who were opposed to elections and called upon all the other democratic parties to unite with a common programme.⁵⁹

Maulana Bhasani has never expressed a serious interest in Parliamentary politics. His main orientation had been towards agitation. In spite of his popularity with the masses, he never pursued a legislative career. As a result, a distaste for democratic politics is discernible in his beliefs and actions. Instead of welcoming the elections, the Maulana demanded that there should be reservation of seats for the workers and peasants in the future National Assembly.⁶⁰ He deferred a decision about his participation in the elections saying that this should be decided by the NAP Council.⁶¹ There is a lobby inside his party, however, which is inclined towards participation; its members argue that the NAP can make a useful contribution inside the elected

⁵⁴ Professor Muzaffar Ahmed, *Present Situation and Our Duties*, Dacca, 1970; and "A Political Commentator," *Ensuing Elections and Our Problematic Society*, Dacca, 1970.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Dawn*, February 10, 1970.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Sangbad*, February 20, 1970 (Bengali daily published from Dacca which supports pro-Moscow and leftist politics in general).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, February 16, 1970.

⁶⁰ Fazle Lohani, *The Field of Mahipur* (a Bengali brochure on Maulana Bhasani), Dacca, 1970.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

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assembly by ventilating the grievances of the people.⁶² To meet the sentiments of this lobby, the Maulana has, so far, accorded only a conditional recognition to the elections. Addressing a tea-garden workers' rally at Shamsernagar, Sylhet, in February 1970 he put forward a three-point programme of conditional support for elections in the country: (a) provincial autonomy on the basis of the Lahore Resolution of 1940; (b) reservation of seats for peasants and workers in forthcoming National Assembly; (c) recognition of the basic rights of the peasants and workers by the Government.⁶³ These conditions are not likely to be fulfilled before the elections. General Yahya categorically declared that the question of provincial autonomy should be decided finally by the members of the elected assembly.⁶⁴ It is not really feasible to reserve seats for the workers and peasants as other occupational groups would also raise similar demands. It is also obvious that a real improvement of the workers and peasants' living conditions cannot be achieved within the short period available before the elections.

While Maulana Bhasani was vacillating about the elections, some of his followers took a more militant view. Early in January 1970, the pro-Chinese NAP unleashed a campaign against the elections, with the slogan: "Food Before Vote."⁶⁵ In their propaganda against the elections, they gave the following reasons: First, the elections announced by the martial law authority were only a hoax which would contribute nothing to the welfare of the common man; hence, the people should be "freed" from the illusions of the elections by anti-election movements. Secondly, elections were incapable of bringing an end to exploitation by the "vested" interests; in fact, parliamentary democracy was only a facade behind which all kinds of exploitation will persist. Thirdly, the people could no longer be contented with elections since they were now ready for the revolutionary class-struggle.⁶⁶ Fourthly, elections under military rule could not be free and unfettered and the elected legislature would not be a sovereign body to decide the future of the country.⁶⁷

The internecine quarrel in the pro-Bhasani East Pakistan NAP came to the fore and the belligerent factions inside the party resorted to press state-

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Morning News*, February 2, 1970.

⁶⁴ Text of General Yahya's address to the Nation on March 28, 1970, in *Pakistan Observer*, March 29, 1970.

⁶⁵ The campaign was mostly led by the student front of NAP (pro-Chinese) called EPSU (Menon). Numerous handbills were also circulated. The following were the main anti-election slogans: (i) we don't want fake elections; (ii) we don't want National Assembly of the exploiters; (iii) we want People's Democracy, etc.

⁶⁶ Mahbubullah, *In the Context of January Movements* (a Bengali pamphlet published by the EPSU (Menon), Dacca, 1970).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

ments to "expose the true colour of their rivals."⁶⁸ It was reported that there were as many as four factions in the party and the main quarrel arose between two factions—one opposing participation in the election and the other supporting participation.⁶⁹ The anti-election lobby was spearheaded by Mr. Mohammad Toaha, General Secretary of the East Pakistan NAP, who had dissociated himself from Maulana Bhasani's peasants' rally at Santosh in January 1970 which was reported to be backed mainly by the pro-election lobby of the party.⁷⁰ Only a few days after this development, Mr. Toaha went to Karachi and categorically announced that the main objective of his party was to establish "people's democracy" and this could not be attained by parliamentary elections which he termed as "bourgeois politics."⁷¹

Mr. Toaha was the leader of the hard core in the NAP and his followers inside the party were known as the Toaha-Abdul Huq faction (Huq being another prominent personality of this group who has mainly concentrated on peasant movements).⁷² These hard-core followers were no longer willing to accept Maulana Bhasani as the leader of the "revolutionary left," a man who, according to them, suffered from "incurable petit-bourgeois" contradictions and was steeped in communal beliefs.⁷³ This stand by Mr. Toaha was, however, keenly contested by the other activist groups in the NAP—the Deben Sikdar-Matin-Alauddin and Zafar-Menon factions—who held that the Maulana was the most dependable ally for the left.⁷⁴ The critics of the Maulana pointed out that he had taken a big step backward in his political career by declaring that he stood for "Islamic socialism."⁷⁵ To speak for Islamic socialism was nothing short of defending communalism and the expulsion of the non-Muslims from the NAP and the East Pakistan *Krishak Samity* (Peasants Society).⁷⁶

The present crisis in the NAP is not only the result of the contradictions of its leader, Maulana Bhasani, although he has indeed created confusion by his attempts to mix socialism and Islam. It is also a crisis of leftist politics in general. The leftists are at the crossroads of decision as to whether socialism can be achieved directly through armed revolution or by democratic means. The hard core of the Bhasani-NAP allege that the middle-class leadership of the party is interfering with the proletarian revolution.⁷⁷ In fact, most of the leaders of the NAP belong to the educated middle class.

⁶⁸ *Pakistan Observer*, January 29, 1970.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Sangbad*, February 7, 1970.

⁷³ *Holiday*, February 1, 1970.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ At the peasants' rally held at Santosh in January 1970.

⁷⁶ *Holiday*, January 18, 1970.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, February 8, 1970.

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Many office-bearers and members of the Working Committees of the two NAPs in East Pakistan are university graduates.⁷⁸ Even the “ultra-revolutionary” Toaha and Abdul Huq, trade unionist and peasant leader respectively, are university graduates. The peasant leaders of the Bhasani-NAP are also mainly based on urban areas and are in no sense tillers of the soil. Maulana Bhasani gave a stern warning to Toaha and other “ultra-revolutionaries” who were out to “destroy the NAP and the East Pakistan Peasants’ Society” with their slogans for revolution.⁷⁹ He also alleged that the real reason for dissension inside the party was the influence of Hindu leftist leaders who wanted to destroy the NAP in collusion with their Muslim followers.⁸⁰

What is the future of the NAP? Whether the pro-Bhasani NAP takes part in the elections or not, the fissures inside the party cannot be repaired.⁸¹ There is no doubt that the role of Maulana Bhasani as the leader of the leftist movement has been seriously challenged by forces who want to divert their movement from reform to radicalism and militancy.⁸² They believe that socialism can only be achieved by an armed revolution of the people. Yet the Maulana himself has made it clear more than once that the new “ultra-revolutionary” forces should plough their own furrow. Among the three main factions of his NAP, the Zafar-Menon and Matin-Alauddin groups are likely to stick to Bhasani because of his mass following; on the other hand, the Toaha-Abdul Huq faction appears to have abandoned him once and for all.⁸³ There is also another section popularly known as the “Mao Thought Group” led by Siraj Sikder (predominantly based on the district of Faridpur in East Pakistan) which has also lost faith on the Maulana.

⁷⁸ In the executive body of the pro-Moscow East Pakistan NAP, there are about 20 university graduates who are predominantly lawyers, businessmen and journalists and in the executive body of the pro-Chinese NAP in East Pakistan there are about 25 university graduates who represent a similar occupational background. This information was collected by some students of the Department of Political Science, Dacca University in January 1970.

⁷⁹ *Dainik Pakistan*, March 22, 1970.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ The Working Committee of the Bhasani-NAP rejected the Legal Framework Order announced by General Mohammad Yahya Khan on March 30, 1970 which would govern the conduct of ensuing elections and working of the future National Assembly in framing a constitution for the country. Although the Working Committee has not categorically rejected the elections, it has called upon the people to launch a country-wide movement to redress their grievances. See also *Sangbad*, April 13, 1970, and *Pakistan Observer*, April 13, 1970.

⁸² The impression is gathered from interviews with several leftist leaders as well as their publications such as *Holiday* (weekly), *Gana Sakti* (weekly), and numerous political pamphlets.

⁸³ It is interesting to note that, following the divisions in the Bhasani-NAP, the pro-Chinese Students Party EPSU (Menon) also split into three factions in April-May, 1970.

The result of such a division is clear. For the time being, leftist politics will remain weak. The umbrella of the Bhasani-NAP will, however, cover a good many followers. Those who would break away from Maulana Bhasani can either form a new radical organisation or wait until the Communist Party is allowed to operate as a legal organization.⁸⁴ There is also another possibility: the militant elements may continue to organise the peasants and workers "underground." Such "underground" activities have also two possibilities: they may provide only theoretical orientations to the workers and peasants for socialism and prepare them for the "final struggle,"⁸⁵ or the more extreme possibility is the organization of guerrilla tactics among peasants and workers.⁸⁶ Some of the theoreticians among the leftists keenly believe that a small group of dedicated workers can successfully launch revolutionary movements in different areas,⁸⁷ and they look firmly to China as the leader of the world revolutionary left.

The prospects of constitutional socialism through the democratic process, on the other hand, are not bright. It is well known that the pro-Moscow NAP does not enjoy much popular support in the country except in the Northwest Frontier Province where Wali Khan appears to be a favourite of the Pathans.⁸⁸ The announcement of the Legal Framework Order (LFO) by President Yahya Khan on March 30, 1970 has created a clear division between the East Pakistan NAP (pro-Moscow) and West Pakistan NAP (pro-Moscow).⁸⁹ The two leaders of the NAP, Professor Muzaffar Ahmed and Wali Khan, held contrary views on the LFO. Professor Muzaffar Ahmed, President of the East Pakistan NAP, criticised the constitutional framework for obstructing the sovereignty of the forthcoming National Assembly whereas Wali Khan, like others from West Pakistan, welcomed the announcement.⁹⁰ The differences of opinion between these

⁸⁴ There are frequent demands from the leftist platform to withdraw the ban on the Communist Party in Pakistan. Maulana Bhasani has also repeatedly demanded this.

⁸⁵ The *Gana Sakti* (a Bengali weekly), on the whole, provides the theoretical groundwork of class struggle.

⁸⁶ In a peasant rally held in West Pakistan, Maulana Bhasani was reported to have said that he would launch guerilla war in the country if "people's demands" were not met. *Pakistan Times*, March 28, 1970. The militant leftists, however, did not take it seriously as they felt that the Maulana was not really capable of organizing a guerilla movement.

⁸⁷ Such views were expressed to the writer by several leftwing intellectuals. Communist theoreticians elsewhere have similar beliefs. See Carl Leiden and Karl M. Schmitt, *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in Modern World*, New York, Prentice Hall, 1968, p. 26.

⁸⁸ In West Pakistan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's left-wing People's Party is gaining popularity with the younger generation.

⁸⁹ President Yahya Khan announced the Legal Framework Order which would govern the conduct of elections as well as the role of the future National Assembly in framing a constitution.

⁹⁰ The crux of the LFO is the provision that, if the President refuses to authenticate the constitution, the National Assembly would stand dissolved and that he would be the sole arbiter in interpreting the Order. Both the NAP and Awami League in East Pakistan have

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two leaders, have become so prominent now that political observers feel, a final break-up is imminent.⁹¹ There is a definite possibility of an alignment between the pro-Moscow NAP and the Awami League in East Pakistan. But such an alliance may not be considered desirable for the NAP in West Pakistan where the Awami League has so far failed to make any satisfactory progress.⁹² Now the pro-Moscow East Pakistan NAP is also faced with a dilemma: on its own it cannot expect any significant success in the future elections nor can it enter into an alliance without risking a final rupture between the two wings of the party. So far, the Awami League has not seriously responded to Professor Muzaffar Ahmed's urge for alliance. Even if an alliance is forged, the right-wing Awami League, which is predominantly supported by East Pakistani businessmen and professionals, will compel Muzaffar's NAP to reduce its demands for a socialist order.

University of Dacca, May 1970

Postscript (August 31, 1970)

THE GENERAL SECRETARY of the East Pakistan NAP, Mr. Mohammad Toaha, announced his resignation from the party on May 31, 1970, stating that his difference with the party chief was not personal but ideological. He said that the objective of the NAP was to establish a society free from exploitation through the mechanism of "Scientific Socialism" but that the Maulana had started preaching "Islamic Socialism" without consulting his organization. Within a few days Mr. Abdul Haque, General Secretary of the East Pakistan Peasants' Society, also resigned from his post, asserting that he believed in Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought and that the Society was incapable of bringing "salvation" to the farmers. On June 27 the Bhasani-NAP decided to contest the forthcoming general election (now postponed until December 1970). In a resolution adopted at the three-hour session of the Council, the Working Committee was empowered to decide the exact nature and extent of NAP's participation in the election. It also set up an eight-member parliamentary board to nominate candidates. Maulana Bhasani, however, remained absent from the Council session. On August 2, an emergency Council meeting of the East Pakistan NAP (Bhasani Group) approved participation in the elections provided that the Legal Framework Order was amended. Mr. Mashiur Rahman was elected General Secretary of the party. The Council meeting also called upon the party units all over the country to organise a mass-movement demanding release of all political prisoners, and action towards a solution of East Pakistan's flood problems.

challenged these provisions of LFO which, according to them, amount to negation of democratic principles.

⁹¹ *The Evening Post*, May 2, 1970.

⁹² See also Rashiduzzaman, "The Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan," *op. cit.*